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THE INFLUENCE OF IMMIGRATION ON AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

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If we are working for the best economic welfare of the United States as a whole, including all of its industries, it is surely true that "we cannot have too much of the right kind of immigration; (and) we cannot have too little of the wrong kind . . ." In order to secure any results we must exclude the undesirables and properly distribute the desirables. Distribution here must be taken to mean placing the acceptable immigrants in touch with the industries in which they expect to spend their lives, and showing them where the best opportunities are within the industries selected. In controlling immigration we must first of all put aside the cry of "America for Americans" and justify our acts according to the needs of the different industries with special reference to the different needs of any industry or sub-industry in different communities.

If this much is accepted we may at once add that, although the cities are overcrowded with immigrants and the country is in need of more people, it may be a poor policy to try to dump the surplus from the cities on the country districts. Agriculture has so long been looked upon as the dumping ground of all surplus labor in case of city industries, of all poverty-stricken persons in case of famines and all revolutionary individuals in case of disruption in European countries, that it is hard to realize that we have reached the state where farming in practically all of its branches requires a very high order of intelligence and the capacity to grasp and use a great variety of scientific facts.

We may, therefore, say that, although it is true that we need farm labor very much, as a relief for current immigration, agricultural distribution is not promising. If the entire mass of immigrants were divided and distributed as they arrive, agriculture probably would not suffer much or refuse her share; but the surplus which it is often suggested might be sent to the country generally

has reference to the refuse immigration which is not wanted in the industries clustered in large manufacturing or distributing centers.

There are two great classes of immigrants that can find room in various branches of the agricultural industry. The first class is composed of those from overcrowded agricultural communities in their home countries. On account of the high state of development of their industry they can teach us much which we have failed to take advantage of and which would result in the uplift of many of the sub-industries in agriculture in this country. These should be urged to bring with them their home industries and introduce new phases of agriculture into this country. The United States has been spending millions of dollars in introducing new plants, animals and methods of farming from other countries. At the same time little groups of foreigners such as the Swiss of Wisconsin or later the Italians in some southern districts, formerly thought of as the least desirable immigrants have settled in our midst and put into practice their home training which has resulted in the establishment of great industries such as the Swiss cheese industry. The class of immigrants most desired is, therefore, those who will add most to the industry they enter. But it is not necessary that the immigrants should introduce some new sub-industry or be in advance of us in their methods in order to make them eligible to enter the agricultural industries. We may say as a general proposition that farmers from nearly any agricultural community in Europe would be acceptable in some of the agricultural industries of this country. For short periods and in the case of some few nationalities the old settlers have objected and doubtless will object in some communities to individual immigrants; but after a short display of sentiment or prejudice has been put aside, farmers from other countries are reasonably sure to meet with favor and success in agriculture here. If, therefore, reasonable precautions are taken the immigrants referred to, even though they bring no new industry, will not become public charges, but will add to the general prosperity of the country. The class objected to, the refuse from other industries, not only adds nothing new but is apt either to lower the standard of the agricultural industry or to become a public charge.

But it is not enough to encourage one class of immigrants and discourage or prohibit others. The immigrants must not only come from rural districts in their mother country; if they are to succeed,

they must be properly located here. Probably the most important single condition is that immigrants should be directed toward and urged to locate where their physical environment will correspond as nearly as may be to that of their mother country. By that I mean that not only should the climate be nearly the same, but the precipitation, the soils and the topography should approach that of their former home, if possible. Failure to satisfy these preliminary requirements has resulted in almost complete failure or a long period of suffering, while attention to these factors has produced unpredicted successes.

The next consideration of singular importance is that the social environment should be acceptable. If the agricultural operations are not close to a city where others of the same nationality are employed in other industries, it is desirable—almost necessary—that a considerable number be allowed, even induced, if need be, to settle in a community. At first, they will live as a world apart, but they give off ideas and take on others and at the end of a generation or two a few intermarriages will have broken down the hard and fast wall between settlements. Common markets, interchange of labor supply, contests between settlements, political and other conflicts, and back of it all the common school system, soon result in an amalgamated, assimilated race.

The next consideration which should be held in mind in determining upon the distribution of immigrants among the different branches of the agricultural industry is the economic status of the people to be distributed and their plans or ambitions for the future. Thus, some are independent laborers, others ready to become tenants and still others to be land owners. Some plan to be employees as long as they stay; some of these would plan to save a snug fortune in a few years and return to the mother country, others to earn and use the returns from year to year. Some plan to step up to the position of tenant and employer, others are ready to enter that state at once. Some are ready to become land owners and independent farmers by purchase of land in settled districts, others with less capital would go to the frontier with poorer markets and grow up with the country, enduring hardships but accumulating wealth. There is room for all of these classes of people in nearly all parts of the country.

Although there are other factors to be taken into consideration

in any extended study of this question, the limits of this paper make it necessary to confine the study to a brief statement of some of the more important, and we may now briefly illustrate these with some of the experiences of immigrants which have come under notice. The extended successes accompanied by individual failures of the English-speaking peoples who early entered the agricultural industry of this country need not be expanded upon here. Neither will any detailed treatment of the extensive settlement by Germans in the north central states during the last half century be made. We may place the general influx of Scandinavians into Minnesota and the Dakotas in the same class and pass by all of these—which means the great bulk of immigrants of agricultural people—with the statement that they represent success and with the assumption that students of economics know of these classes and know of their successes. It is because we are too apt to stop at this point and say that other nationalities as a rule have little or nothing to offer that this paper is presented. The writer would emphasize the fact that we have room for farmers from many lands, assuming that we act intelligently in our choice and properly distribute those who come.

The large Swiss settlement in Green County, Wisconsin, illustrates success in the introduction of a new sub-industry of great importance. Having struggled for years trying to farm in the American way, these immigrants finally turned to the great industry of their home country. They had settled in a physical environment which was very much like what they left abroad. Now several hundred cheese factories are prospering and millions of pounds of cheese are annually placed upon our markets. A study of that particular case shows that about 99 per cent of the cheese made is of fancy or foreign varieties. Most of it is the famous Swiss cheese. It should also be noted that nearly all of those engaged in making this cheese and in buying and selling it are Swiss or of Swiss origin. The writer feels that this colony is a great success, is the kind of thing this country wants, is the basis of prosperity in our agriculture and must not be condemned because of the fact that broad Swiss is sometimes spoken or because the thousands of members of the district are not assimilated during the first generation. The writer has found individuals and small groups of settlers from this colony and from "the old country" moving far up into the Northwest

carrying with them the information and ambition to start other colonies as prosperous as the old one. The acquisition of such an industry is as valuable to this country as the introduction of a new plant that may have required the expenditure of a hundred thousand dollars.

Turning from this prosperous Swiss district, we may direct our attention to a Bohemian center in northwestern Minnesota. The Swiss had sent explorers ahead to find a desirable location before coming to this country and settling down. The Bohemians were in no greater financial straits in their home country than the Swiss had been, but they were brought in and located by great transportation companies. The soil where the Bohemians were "dumped" is very good; precipitation and topography are good; but the country needs an expensive drainage system. The poor immigrants are not in a position to establish it. The result is that for some fifteen years we have had before our eyes a Bohemian colony numbering hundreds of people, unable to establish a prosperous community because of unfavorable natural conditions. These people are efficient and willing. The state was at fault in allowing the mistake to take place, and it continues open to blame for not taking more active steps toward improvement. In passing from house to house in that district, an interpreter was often necessary, but not because the people did not wish to learn the English. Each year sees the children mingling more with the outside neighborhood and learning our language, customs and laws. These people will succeed in time, despite obstacles, but some common-sense assistance would hasten the day of their prosperity.

In other parts of the United States large settlements of Bohemians of no higher standard are prosperous and happy. As an illustration of the status that should obtain the writer would refer to some of the very prosperous communities of Poles and Icelanders in North Dakota and elsewhere. No class of citizens, whether immigrants or descended from immigrants half a dozen steps removed, could ask for greater material progress, better buildings—homes, churches, schools and town buildings—than the Polish settlement around Warsaw, Poland, Minto, and Ardock in Walsh County, North Dakota. The writer's knowledge of this and other communities of like character leads him to say that to encourage such settlements is to foster prosperity and frugality as

well as to place the stamp of approval upon a home-loving, land-loving class of farmers. If we pass on to settlements of Russians we may say nearly the same as above. With a love for land and home which is almost beyond our understanding, these people are too often frugal to a fault. They come with a low standard of living and during the first generation the standard does not rise much. But the change soon comes. The children, or at least the grandchildren, become thoroughly American unless the immigrants have been located in an environment where success is impossible. In this connection we might refer to such concrete cases as the settlements in central and western North Dakota, or the large prosperous colony in Ellis County, Kansas, or the newer settlements in the Southwest.

Nor need we stop with the Swiss, Bohemians, Polanders, Icelanders and Russians. If we turn our attention to the Italians coming into the South we find them filling the various places demanding attention. There is a large demand for white labor, and the mass of Italians who do not intend to make this their life home more and more fill a long-felt need. With the great numbers of Mexicans coming across the line for part of a season this demand may gradually be better and better satisfied. There is also a large demand for tenants, and this cry is being answered by Italians. These newcomers are not only fitting into the cotton-growing industry in competition with the colored people, but are proving their efficiency in vegetable and fruit farming. Of late years such settlements as that of Italians at Tontitown, Arkansas, in the Ozark Mountains, show also that Italians can bring their home industry with them and succeed here. They not only settle down as dignified farmers, but actually teach our farmers many things. Vegetables, apples, plums, grapes and other fruits are successfully grown. If the colony located at Sunnyside, Arkansas, at an earlier date was a failure at first, it is no sign that Italians cannot succeed in agriculture. Immigrants, largely from other industries, placed in competition with negroes in production of a crop that they knew absolutely nothing about, under foremen accustomed to drive slaves, in a swamp country—hot and sickly to newcomers—attacked by malarial fever and losing a large number of the first settlers, it is not to be wondered at that failure was threatened. But success has come even in that case, where failure at first stared all in the face.

With colonies like the Brandsville Swiss settlement in Missouri, with the Italians and Russians coming even into old New England, with Mexicans pushing up into the Southwest, and with other nationalities gradually finding their own, we may indeed turn our attention toward the agricultural industry as a much neglected field. The cry of "back to the land" will not go unheeded by immigrants who have come from farms in their mother country if any reasonable amount of effort is put forth to "assist them to find themselves."

Reference might also be made to the Jewish farm problems of the Middle Atlantic States, problems which have importance as far west as Wisconsin; and to the Japanese and Chinese agricultural labor problems of the far West and Southwest. There are possibilities here which few people have yet appreciated. The question of demand for seasonal agricultural labor and the possibilities of continual labor by passing from one industry to another in neighboring districts or following the same industry from one part of the country to another, are left untouched. With them are left the problems of farm wages and treatment of agricultural labor, and also of services rendered by the farm laborer.¹

¹For a brief article by the author on "The Status of the Farm Laborer in the North Central States," see "Wisconsin Student Farmer," 1908.